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AUTHOR	Hall, Randall K.
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ABSTRACT

In 1969 the Saginaw, Michigan City School System affiliated with the Remotely Accessible Management System (RAMS) developed by the Oakland Schools, a regional service agency. The affiliation enabled Saginaw to move into computerized data processing with minimal costs for programing personnel, systems specialists, hardware, software, and operating personnel. Program packages were developed to run data processing operations in the areas of finance, personnel, and student records. The district uses a Remcon 2780 terminal and relies heavily upon Request, a procedure which the user employs to obtain information from a file by writing a program to format reports that meet particular needs. On the whole, Saginaw's experience with the time-shared system has been a successful one, largely due to the service orientation of the central computer facility of RAMS and to the strong inservice training provided to the local district personnel. (PB)

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A USER OF RAMS* - SAGINAW CITY SCHOOLS

Randall K. Hall

Saginaw City Schools (Mich.)

Saginaw, Michigan is an industrial city and a regional trading center located about 70 miles northwest of Pontiac, Michigan.

The Saginaw City School System serves 23,000 students (about half of the K-12 students of the county in which it is located). It has to cope with all the problems associated with the terms "inner-city", "disadvantaged", "integration", "white-flight", as well as fiscal problems unique to cities.

In 1969, after much study, the Saginaw Board of Education accepted the recommendation of a consultant to affiliate with the Oakland Schools and use RAMS* (Remotely Accessible Management System) which Oakland was in the process of developing.

The Board felt that this affiliation would enable us to move into data processing quickly without bearing the cost of programming and system specialists, that it would minimize our costs for hardware, software, and operating personnel, and that it would enable us to utilize the skills of an experienced central staff and a more powerful computer than we would otherwise be able to afford.

After the addition of one person to the staff, a Director of Data Processing, we proceeded to implement RAMS. Change involving black boxes and buzz words together with the abolishment of ways we had "always done things" caused some apprehension on the part of the personnel involved. With some help from the people at the Oakland Schools Data Center practically all of our re-training took place "in house". We found what they assured us was true, that it was not necessary for us to have technical types at our end of the operation. We found that we had little use for them ... and when necessary excellent people were available at the computer center.

Our first payroll on RAMS was run in July 1969 on an IBM 2780. We scheduled three of our secondary schools in the Fall of 1969. We found we were dealing with a "system of schools", and the part that was time-consuming had to do with tasks such as standardizing course codes. We also put the Financial package on the computer in the Summer of 1969 and were in a position to pull financial statements and budget-responsibility reports in late 1969 and early 1970. Later we moved to complete scheduling and grade reporting for the 10,000 students in our eight secondary schools.

RANDALL K. HALL is the Director of Purchasing and Data Processing for Saginaw Public Schools, Saginaw, Michigan. He earned a B.A. in Business from Michigan State University, an M.A. in Education from Michigan State University, and an M.B.A. from the University of Michigan.

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We now have the complete personnel package on which includes not only payroll but personnel attendance, professional certification, tenure and experience, salary projection studies, etc.

Our Testing and Evaluation Department is utilizing the format of the RAMS Student Package for gathering information on students with the idea of having our student files on-line at some future time. Planning ahead at this time will make the install easier when the time comes.

We are presently using a Remcom 2780 terminal in our operation. The advances in speed, and reliability of dial-up telephone lines and attendant gear in the four years we have been involved in teleprocessing have been startling. Technical type people are always inquiring as to the speed of our equipment, which is no doubt important, but seems rather immaterial to us as seldom are things functioning at rated speed, and we tend to think in terms of how long it takes to do various jobs. For instance, in 1969 it took us about three and one-half hours to print about 2,000 pay checks and we had to be in constant attendance. Today we print about 2,500 pay checks in one and one-half hours by getting it started and walking away. Shortly we expect to increase that speed twenty-five percent at a cost of about twenty-five dollars a month.

A part of RAMS we find particularly useful is called "Request". Request is a procedure we can use to obtain information from a file by writing a program to format reports that meet our particular needs. For instance, we may want mailing labels for a group of persons in the personnel file having certain characteristics, or want to know the historical record of budgeted and actual expenditures in a select group of general ledger accounts, or have a listing of vendors with whom we have done a dollar volume of business above a certain level.

It is very possible that a school system could time-share with a group and not have an experience as pleasant as ours. For a group time-sharing system to work well we believe the computer center must have a strong service orientation, be responsive in so far as possible to individual users wishes by providing options in the programs being developed, and have a feel for fairness in dealing with the participants.

Strong in-service programs for users would seem to be a must, not only in new program development, but to keep operations smooth in spite of inevitable changes and personnel turnover. The center dealing with small users with little or no backup personnel should be prepared to provide temporary operating personnel.

Four years after Saginaw City Schools made the decision to process data as a member of a group via teleprocessing we are even more convinced that it is a most efficient way to go. If the next four years bring as much progress as the past four we feel we will be using most, if not all, of the other applications presently available or being developed as part of RAMS.